



PEACE WORKS

PEACE IS IN OUR HANDS

GOVT., MILF RESUME PEACE TALKS Rebels Submit New Settlement Plan

ZAMBOANGA CITY –

THE Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is looking at the same concept of the peace agreements in South Sudan and Northern Ireland in setting up its own political system in Mindanao as based on its draft proposal sent to the Aquino administration during resumption of negotiation early February in Kuala Lumpur.

This was stated in a document sent to PeaceWorks, in which the MILF pointed to least 11 key areas that constitute their new comprehensive draft proposal.

Mohagher Iqbal, chairman of the MILF peace panel, said their organization withdrew an earlier proposal submitted during the time of Arroyo administration last year.

“We are submitting a new draft, whose essential elements are similar to the first, to our esteemed counterpart from the government and the Malaysian third country facilitator,” he said.

In the document, the MILF described their new draft as “a formula of peace through the exhaustion of all democratic remedies to solve a home-grown sovereignty-based conflict, which, following the same approach, other similar global sovereignty-based conflicts have also been successfully resolved, such as in South Sudan and Northern Ireland.”

The Front said their new proposal seeks to “correct and solve the one-sidedness or imbalance of totality of relationship between Filipinos

EXODUS. Villagers from Barangay Naangan in Kabacan, Cotabato evacuate with their belongings on board a farm tractor on February 10 due to clashes between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the villages of Naangan and Simone, all in Kabacan. Some 8,700 persons have been displaced due to sporadic fighting since January. MindaNews Photo Keith Bacongco

Filipinos and Moros, the former continue to be rulers and sole decision-makers, while the latter as mere second class citizens without any role in national decision-making.”

The MILF is targeting a share of land territory in Mindanao.

“It affords the people of the future Bangsamoro state to have a modest share and taste of the remaining 7-9 percent of the lands, wealth and resources of what used to be 98 percent at the turn of the last century,” the document reads, adding that “it balances the issues of state’s sovereignty and people’s right to self-determination, an issue not even the United Nations has fully succeeded to settle to this day.”

As previously announced, the MILF is aiming to have an “asymmetrical state-substate relationships, wherein powers of the central

Cont. on page 3/Govt., MILF Resume...

TRUTH



JUSTICE



LOVE



FREEDOM

[Our Peace]

Taking on Commander Kato

AFTER a two-year hiatus and months of preparation by the new Aquino administration, the long and winding 10-year old peace talks between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is once again underway. The parties met in Kuala Lumpur last February 9-10, during which they renewed the mandates of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) and Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG). They also discussed MILF's request for the release of 25 persons under government detention who the MILF claims are their members and, therefore, are political detainees. The government panel also received the Bangsamoro group's revised "Comprehensive Compact", which consists of nine general points by which it proposes the hoped-for eventual, final agreement would be informed.

The meeting ended on a highly optimistic note on the part of both parties, who agreed to continue the session on March 29-30. Except that, one recent development, the breakaway of Commander Ustadz Ameril Umbra Kato from the MILF and his forming of a new group called Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), cast a shadow over this new round and its prospects. According to the post-meeting communiqué, the MILF formally brought up the matter; and outside of the forum, the Front has issued statements assuaging expressed fears of various quarters that the emergence of the BIFF will undermine the whole effort to find and implement a peace settlement.

"The leadership has effective control over political and military wings of the MILF," rebel leader Al Haj Murad Ebrahim was quoted as saying in a news report, and he asserted that the BIFF is but another wing under the Front's Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces.

But others are not assured, already worried this early. "The new group of Ustadz Ameril Umbra Kato is a significant force that can challenge peace and stability in Mindanao," said Rommel Banlaoi, executive director of the

Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research, as we quote him in a news report.

"A splinter group could be dangerous if it had outside support or significant resources, or if it presaged further splintering of the MILF", said another observer with qualification.

It was Commander Kato who famously led a violent rampage in Lanao towns immediately after the collapse of the MOA-Ancestral Domain deal in 2008. As a religious teacher before he became a Bangsamoro military commander, Kato shares that same aspect with the late MILF founder Ustadz Hashim Salamat, who broke away from Nur Misuari's Moro National Liberation Front because he was disappointed with the Tripoli Agreement. On the basis of Kato's professional background and track record, the history of rebel "lost commands" as spoilers, and growing international religious militancy, the fears about the BIFF are valid.

A final peace agreement by the government with the MILF is as strategically important for all players as its agreement with the MNLF back in 1996. But as the latter's bumpy experience has shown ever since, immense social capital – that is, the support of all stakeholders – is required for a peace agreement to work and achieve its goals.

Now, there is much more if not sufficient social capital to address a problem like Commander Kato, which is but another item in the conundrum for real peace arising from the totality and complexity of the Bangsamoro aspiration. The BIFF threat cannot be left to the MILF leadership to alone resolve. The Kuala Lumpur talks has its International Contact Group and the like while the home field is teeming with civil society groups and sectors variously involved in the peace process and peace-building. To seize the peace, they just may have to get their hands on the Kato problem, and the sooner the better.

PAZ Staffer Joins Japan's 2011 Training Program for Young Leaders

By Aldrin B. Abdurahim

"PEACE comes from the heart! It is bridging the gaps of societal divisions that connect people to society"

It is with this exhortation that 16 "peace ambassadors" from various localities in the Philippines collaboratively enunciated the essence of promoting peace in an intensive, fun-filled, exciting journey of the 2011 Training Programme for Young Leaders (TPYL) under the Post War Reconstruction and Peace Building Course held at Hiroshima City, Japan from January 23-Feb. 9. Young professionals to include doctors, police officer, teacher, non-government organization executives (including this author/PAZ staffer), international donors and media practitioners actively participated in the course on peace-building.

The training program sponsored by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) provided the participants an avenue to strengthen peace building structures and promote peace education through training people with necessary knowledge and abilities for peace building. The entire duration of the training yielded many

positive impacts among the participants vis a vis with the coordinators, organizers and resource persons from Japan.

Activities in the TPYL included workshop lectures and discussions, community visits and exposures (companies and primary school), tours and open forum regarding the atomic bombing experience of Hiroshima City transforming it from a military city to its reconstruction as a Peace City from various stakeholders and peace actors (government, non-government organizations, A-Bomb survivors, peace volunteers, universities and student organizations).

The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Peace Memorial Park gave the participants a clear understanding of the 1945 A-Bomb event that seemingly not just alarmed the country of Japan but the entire world. The TPYL experience depicted how the sense of devastation inspired the Japanese people to develop a strong sense of nationalism.

Cont. on Page 3/PAZ Staffer...

PAZ staffer Aldrin Abdurahim (leftmost) with co-participants in the JICA-sponsored study tour of Hiroshima City.



Cordaid

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government and state government are clearly stated, aside from those powers they jointly exercise..."

The new draft also touches the issues of citizenship, saying that they aspire to have "modest recognition to the Moro aspiration for separate national identity, as Bangsamoro, while retaining their Filipino citizenship."

"It is a win-win formula that benefits not only Moros and the indigenous peoples, but also the Filipinos and the government in Manila. The dividends of peace and the lack of war itself - will reach every home not only in the conflict affected areas in Mindanao, but Mindanao as whole and the Philippines in general. Besides refugees from Mindanao will no longer go to Sabah and therefore ceases to be a recurring problem to the Government of Malaysia," the draft reads.

Iqbal said they expect the second round of talks, which will be on March 29 and 30, to center their discussion in the points they have raised in

PAZ Staffer...

Sixteen Filipinos, empowered as young leaders on the other hand related the bittersweet realities in their country. In a nutshell, Mindanao was highlighted in many discussions as many participants represented areas of Mindanao. The continuous struggle for lasting peace was the central theme in the many job reports of this participant. Poverty alleviation, educational development, capacity development of communities and sustainability, armed conflicts, biases and prejudices were among the few that the country needs to collaboratively address with right solutions anchored by proper decisions among stakeholders.

Peace transformation content, context and approaches were shared by training organizers (Koremana and Japan Overseas Cooperative Association), coordinators (JICA, JOCA and JICE) and many others that significantly played major roles in post war reconstruction (Hiroshima Peace Institute, Hiroshima University, ANT-Hiroshima, Motomachi elementary School, Otafuku Sauce Co. Ltd., Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, Peace Builders).

Hiroshima City, now bearing the monicker of Peace City of the world, wants to convey a strong message for peace building through various efforts that address reconstruction from war and the total banning of nuclear weapons. It inspired the peace ambassadors to commit for peace building and continuously support the campaign through the Mayor for Peace, an initiative that invites local chief executives to strongly support the advocacy for peace.

The ambassadors as part of the "Familia Sumimasen", the group's name, showered many insights as well on how our peace efforts provide greater impact through many activities. Immediate responses crafted the groups action plan through organizing A-Bomb exhibit to pave way in also understanding the Ampatuan massa-

their new proposal.

In his opening speech during the meeting on February 9, Iqbal said the two parties are now entering the integral part of the talk, which is to give a political settlement to the Moros in Mindanao.

"While the exact time to destination cannot be determined right now, but every step we take now is bringing us closer to it. After all, what is left for the Parties to deliberate is the final agenda of the peace talks; i.e., the comprehensive compact," he said.

Earlier, the Marvic M.V.F. Leonen, the government chief negotiator, clarified that the government views the MILF draft paper "as an exposition of their position rather than a working draft for the rest of the negotiating meetings."

"We intend to review it, relate to past documents, work with our principals which also include do-

ing consultations with all those affected. This is the expectation of President Aquino, who will give us the mandate before we state our position on the drafts presented," he said in statement.

"The document submitted as the position of the MILF is not a document that seeks independence nor secession from the Republic of the Philippines. It proposes the cognition of a Bangsamoro identity while maintaining Filipino citizenship. It defines a territory which is seven to nine percent only of their historical claims. The MILF seeks a win-win solution to a century old conflict," he explained.

He said the government is serious in looking at the valid points of the MILF draft, making sure it will not end as the botch Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain, which was ruled as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court on August, 2008.

Cont. on Page 4/Govt., MILF Resume...

Workers remove "Support GPH-NDF Peace Talks" posters along Ulas Bridge in Davao City (posters of all types not allowed there). The GPH and NDF peace panels were in Oslo, Norway February 15 to 21 for the first formal peace talks after six years. MindaNews poto by Keith Bacongco



cre and histories of armed struggle specifically in Mindanao. Addressing peace education from the grassroots communities and community development partners through seminar-workshops, peace camps, youth summit, speakers bureau social enterprise and culture of peace. Also, it includes partnering medical doctors associations and local chief executives to member in the Mayors for Peace advocacy.

The sojourn for peace from the ambassadors strengthens not just new perspectives on peace building but also unloaded biases and prejudices among the Japanese people. It inspired the youth to move forward by building more initiatives through collaboration and partnerships between

the participants and its institutions. It also taught an understanding of one's culture and how it connects to society. The Japan journey will be part of each one's continuous pursuit for the full realization of peace.

The ambassadors, now back in their own communities, will integrate the learning from the training to their respective programs and closely collaborate with existing networks for development from institutions and groups in addressing solutions to the problems of the society. The TPYL served not just an avenue but also a backbone for international approaches for peace and development.

BASILAN BISHOP Asks Govt. to Seize LOOSE FIREARMS

ZAMBOANGA CITY –

CIVIL society groups in the island-province of Basilan have called on government security forces to disarm civilians who possess firearms to prevent the spread of violence in the area.

Basilan Bishop Martin Jumoad, who has been vocal in criticizing the local government units and security enforcers for their failure to protect civilians from being kidnapped and murdered by armed men in the province, has said loose firearms remain a threat to the population.

“Again, I’m asking the military – the men and women in uniform – to really protect the civilians. And one way of doing that would be to really disarm the civilians carrying guns in the province,” he said in a statement published on the Catholic Web site UCANEWS.

Lt. Gen. Raymundo Ferrer, commander of the Western Mindanao Command, has noted the existence of loose firearms among civilians populace in Basilan. He said the military along with the Philippine National Police (PNP) have beefed up operations to track down firearms in the province.

Jaime J. A. Rivera, secretary general and executive director of the Basilan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Inc. said that some civilians opted to carry firearms for protection.

“We understand the Bishop’s stand, but we believe that disarming civilians will not be an effective solution. So as long as rebels and their criminal proxies, as well as politicians, and private armies remain, have firearms then disarming civilians will only take away the last defense of people against the lawless or the powerful and abusive,” he said.

The island-province of Basilan, home to almost 100,000 families, has been the scene of the decades-old armed conflict waged by rebels who are struggling for self-rule in Mindanao

Students from various schools in Zamboanga conduct a prayer rally at Plaza Pershing last February 25 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the EDSA Revolution.



and by banditry.

“This is the first time that we just feel like nobody is doing anything to curb the criminality that’s just gone haywire since the last quarter of 2010. And the authorities just seem to be paralyzed from the brain, down,” the bishop said, referring to the spike of criminalities in the area.

Gun shootings have been rampant in the past days, killing over 10 civilians.

Even kidnapping activities are now regarded as a cottage industry because of the failure of government to punish the perpetrators, civil society groups said.

At present, bandits, who the military describes as “enterprising gangs,” are still holding two kidnapped victims in Basilan. (*Darwin Wally T. Wee*)

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“Again, these are but some of the aspects of what has been submitted, which is their starting position in the negotiations. It is a comprehensive document which we still need to study very carefully with our principals, validate in consultations and compare with our evolving negotiating strategies. The government panel always takes a comprehensive view before coming out with its interpretation of proposals and stating

its position,” Leonen added. (*Darwin Wally T. Wee*)

At Least...

This year’s harvest is 35 (29 books, six journals and reports), including one dictionary, Chavacano-English, English-Chavacano, published by the Ateneo de Zamboanga University Press.

Three books are on soldiers: “Soldiers for Peace” by Bobby Timonera, “War Wounded” by Gail Ilagan and “Soldiers as Peacemakers, Peackeepers and Peacebuilders” by Ret. Lt. General Benjamin Dolorfino.

MindaNews recorded 224 between 2000 and 2009: 33 books in 2009; 36 books and journals in 2008; 30 in 2007; 12 in 2006; 32 in 2005; 29 in 2004; 19 in 2003; 18 in 2002; eight in 2001 and seven in 2000. With 31 more in 2010, that’s a total of 255 books and journals published from 2000 to 2010, as listed by MindaNews. There could be more.

Two books won prestigious awards in 2010: “Bakwit: The Power of the Displaced” by Jose Jowel Canuday (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009) won the National Book Award in the Social Science category; while Agaw Dilim, Agaw Liwanag by Lualhati Milan Abreau (University of the Philippines Press, 2009) won the 2010 Madrigal-Gonzalez Best First Book Award.

PAZ's Youth Peace Troopers Mark Year III

By Aldrin B. Abdurahim

SIXTY-FIVE young peace advocates celebrated the 3rd anniversary of their Youth Solidarity for Peace (YSP), the youth arm of Peace Advocates Zamboanga (PAZ) and Inter-Religious Solidarity Movement for Peace (IRSMP), last February 26 at Zion Evangelical School, Canelar, Zamboanga City.

“You are the future!” declared Dr. Grace J. Rebollos, Western Mindanao State University president and one of the leading peace advocates of the city when she was sharing her stories that made her one of the effective leaders of our society. With young people facing the peace challenges, YSP dubbed “Flourishing



Members of Youth Solidarity for Peace join a citywide fun run last February 27 to raise charity money for the city's marginalized children to cap their organization's anniversary fete. Below, PAZ executive secretary gives them a talk.

Present during the COP were Fr. Angel C. Calvo, CMF (PAZ President), Fr. Angel Angeles, CMF (Claretian Missionary Fathers), Dr. Rebollos, Atty. Paulino R. Ersando (ZION Evangelical School/ Zamboanga Ministers Fellowship President), Jaafar Kimpa (AMORES

“Emphasizing on the role of the youth and being peace volunteers” had been the central theme of the Culture of Peace, paving way for a stronger network of various organizations who advocate peace. A renewal of commitment was also made by the members in many sessions to heighten the commitment of being effective peace volunteers.

PAZ and IRSMP strongly support the advocacy by the youth. Ariel Kenneth Cael, a peace volunteer since 2008, shared in the synthesis and assessment that “Our youth are very much inspired to hear many inspiring messages from leading peace advocates like the IRSMP”. Joshua Pierra, new Youth Coordinator of YSP-PAZ, added that “the commitment to be volunteers comes from within and it will be the youth's guiding force to be responsible for peace and development of our society”.

YSP comprises a pool of organizations to include Muslim Youth Assembly for Peace (MYAP) based in Mariki, PAGASA Youth (Baliwasan), Dominican Youth Choir (Baliwasan), Muslim Youth Functionaries- ISLAM (Pasobolong), Claret Youth Ministry (San Jose), Zamboanga Youth for Peace Organization and High School Peace Clubs, Society of Young Peace Weavers, college and university-based peace clubs and many other affiliated networks.

The YSP will move its peace frontiers as it envisions connecting with many more organizations in the city, region and the country.

Congratulations to the YSP!



2011: I LOVE to be a PEACE Volunteer” as its journey's theme for the year.

The anniversary marked the three years' journey of the organization's peace advocates that aimed at convening members in a culture of peace (COP) session with inputs from notable resource speakers and advocates of peace from its alumni and members of the Inter-Religious Solidarity Movement for Peace (IRSMP).

Interfaith Council President), Prof. Ali T. Yacub, AL-Haj (Golden Crescent Consortium of Peace Builders and Affiliates Chairman), Espie Hupida (Zamboanga Basilan Integrated Development Alliance Regional Technical Coordinator), Sr. Emma I. Delgado (PAZ Executive Secretary), Aldrin Abdurahim (IRSMP Executive Coordinator), Rey-Luis Banagudos (Peaceworks Editor) and Arweda Jalilul (PAZ Peace Educator).



Jennifer Tibayan

Jennifer R. Tibayan: A Peace-Talking Champ

By Karel Mellanes

A GRADUATING high school student whose dream is to become a teacher someday soon was adjudged champion of the “Zamboanga Toastmasters Inter-School Speech Competition” held in Zamboanga City last February 24.

Jennifer Tibayan of Zion Evangelical School bested eight others from various schools in the city. The theme of their oratorical tilt was “Zamboanga City...Haven of Muslim-Christian Harmony”; Tibayan’s free-verse piece was entitled “Rebecca and Hamza”, in which she narrated the hypothetical love story of her Christian sister and her

Muslim boyfriend.

Interviewed by PeaceWorks, Jennifer said that personal hesitation about joining the contest didn’t stop her from pursuing her goal not just to win the contest but to articulate her perceived harmony between Christians and Muslims in her multicultural hometown.

“It wasn’t easy at first, I have even thought to back out, but there’s something that made me think again. Wait, I said to myself, God has given me a chance to be in this situation, why not grab that opportunity and just go on. With the support of my family, friends, classmates and teachers, it inspired me. When that time came, I was there to deliver with ease. And,

Cont. on Page 11/Jennifer...

REBECCA AND HAMZA

(Oratorical piece of Zion Evangelical School’s contestant Jennifer Tibayan in the Inter-School Oratorical Contest sponsored by the Zamboanga toastmasters’ Club on February 25, 2001 in Zamboanga City. Tibayan was adjudged champion.)

My best friend is my eldest sister;
Rebecca is her sweet and simple name.
(Acknowledgment:)
Distinguished members of the Board of
Judges, fellow contestants, respected
friends, ladies and gentlemen peace advo-
cates, good morning.

I have a story to tell about my sweet sis
Rebecca,
And a brave boy called Hamza.
Actually, their story is also about
You and me, about us, too.
No! Yes! About our sweet but not so
simple town of Zamboanga, too.
It is a story about blossoming love,
And then about forgiveness and reconcili-
ation.
Yes, yes, yes! I saw it with my young
eyes
That without the water of forgiveness,
The flower of love soon withers and dies.

Rebecca is a typically pretty girl.
(Spoken as an aside.)
(Do we look alike?
Oh, well, we are sisters, aren’t we? He,
he.)

She was in an internet shop one day
Researching for her graduation thesis
When in through the door came
A brave boy called Hamza.
Well, really, Hamza The Handsome, too!
And he sat right next to her!
Well, at first they exchanged furtive
glances,
But in no time, it was love at first sight!
From sight to sounds of laughter and jok-
ing
And lots and lots and lots without end
Of he and she, Wow! - discovering.
Wow Philippines! A country of
Seven thousand islands to discover,
And every man and woman in it is like an
island, too,

So different, yet so alike.
Wow Zamboanga! The cultural festival
Our government stages now and then;
To reveal and celebrate with a rapturous
joy
The richness of the cultural diversities of
our million-fold residents –
The wonderful, wonderful songs and
dances
Of Tausugs, Samas and Subanens
Of Chavacanos, Yakans and Kalibugans;
Yeah, to rejoice our heavenly corner of a
wildly awesome world.
Of your and my....
Of Rebecca’s and Hamza’s.... “Zamboanga
City:
Haven of Muslim-Christian Harmony.”

Alas!! When our parents found out about
Hamza,
They did not find it amusing, no cause to
celebrate.
They had this thing, I think they call it
cultural bias – Hmmph!
We are Christians, Rebecca!
Don’t even think of it, girl!
Don’t even think of him – that
Hamza? A Tausug in our family?
No way!

Rebecca ran into her room, and I after
her.
But I love Hamza, sister. . .
His name fills my heart and being
With the warm glow of love and light.
Waaaah! What’s wrong with our parents?
What has being Tausug got to do with
love?
He loves me, that I know, Rebecca ago-
nized.
And what about you and me, sister?
We call proudly ourselves Zamboangueñas
But who, who are we really?
Do we know at all?, she asked in sinking
despair.

Well, ahem, little genius sister me
Volunteered an answer to her, to lighten
her darkened heart.
According to my history teacher, I told my
poor Juliet sister,
Today’s Zamboangueños descended from
The Filipino workers and warriors from
Luzon who were
Brought to this place by Spanish conquis-
tadores
And some more later by American military
occupiers –
And lo and behold!
Masters and servants promptly and seri-
ally
Intermarried with the smitten native
Subanons and Samas.

Yes, yes! My smart sister quickly grabbed
the point:
That’s exactly what I want to do with my
poor Romeo:
Intermarry! Intermarry! And the rest will
be history
For our Zamboanga City, for daddy and
mommy,
For Hamza my love and me!

Well, Rebecca was not an English litera-
ture major for nothing.
Suddenly inspired, she climbed on a chair
and declaimed:

“To be or not to be: that is the question;
Whether it is nobler to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous
fortune
Or to take up arms against a sea of
troubles” . . .
No, no, that’s Hamlet, and I am not one
Or about to be him, my sister promptly
checked herself.

Instead, if it’s about intermarriage with

Cont. on page 7/REBECCA...

Symposia and Prayer Assemblies Held by Ahlul-Bayt To Mark Mawludun Nabi

SOME 650 worshippers belonging to Ahlul-Bayt-sponsored mosques and madrasahs located in Zamboanga City, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan attended a religious symposium and prayer assembly in Amil's Tower last February 27 as part of the monthly-long Islamic celebration of Mawludun Nabi.

Ahlul-Bayt (a.s.) Philippine Islamic Assembly, Inc. foundation director Hujjatul Islam Sheikh Denil Anawari gives the main lecture at the Amil's Tower assembly; women and children listen to a similar assembly held in Barangay Sangali, Zamboanga earlier.



This celebration is an expression and manifestation of our compassion, unity, and faith as Muslim believers, Hujjatul Islam Sheikh Denil Anawari told the participants in his main lecture. Anawari is the director of the Ahlul-Bayt (a.s.) Philippine Islamic Assembly, Inc. foundation. Anawari urged the assembly to study and learn the Q'ran thoroughly as it is the source of Islamic faith and hope. He told them that a faithful

fulfillment of their prayer obligations will bring them close to God, under the guiding light of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh).

The religious gathering was the major one among a series that the foundation conducted in the city to mark the birth of Prophet Mohammad, which was celebrated as Mawludun Nabi last February 15, an Islamic holiday. A similar service was also held in a mosque headed by

Imam Hadji Turadji Marani located in Sangali barangay last February 19. The following day, another assembly was also conducted in the Ahlul Bayt Islamic School located in Suterville, this city, which was led by the madrasah's students.

Anawari said that two other such assemblies
Cont. on page 8/Symposia...

REBECCA...

Hamza,
How about this quick paraphrase from Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra:
"Has not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted social pretenses? Is not this city of Zamboanga
More free from dangers than the envious world out there?
Here we feel but the silly burdens of our individual sins,
The passing harshness of the seasons – the fire of summer,
Which when it burns and blows upon my body
Even till I burst with a heat, I smile and say:
'This is no global warming. This is LOVE.'"

Oh yes, she went on –
It is that envious world out there
That tries to divide and make us fight against each other
Here in Zamboanga: the fanatics and bandits they come to try
To kill, kidnap and terrorize,
To rob us of our peaceful relationship
Between Muslims and Christians and all

around.

But as children all of Abraham, we are Gifted with his birthright of a great fatherly love
And it is this love that makes us human –
Not our artificial social and political labels,
Not those painted pretenses.
We in Zamboanga know well this truth,
deep in our common heart;
We are one children of Father Abraham,
Brothers and sisters to one another forever and ever.

One day, though, that envious world out there
Reared its ugly head:
The only brother of our father was kidnapped
By some bandits while he was traveling in Basilan.
Papa was very scared for the life of his brother.
He was mad as hell at all Muslims!
'I told you, I told you,' he shouted at Rebecca –
'That Hamza and his kind. He will pay for this', he raged.

My very broken-hearted and frightened sister
Told Hamza about the kidnapping of our uncle;
This is too much, this is good-bye, she told the guy.

Hamza's father is from Basilan.
And when he learned from his very-concerned son
About the kidnapping, he came over to our house
And consoled and assured our father and invited him
To come to Basilan
To work for the freedom of our uncle.
Father, despite his biases and fears, accepted
The strange offer, surely a real challenge for him.
For love of a brother.

This turn of event made me remember
What our pastor during Sunday service loves to preach:
The offer to make amends, and to accept it, is
The first step to reconciliation, thus to renew

Cont. on Page 12/REBECCA...



IN DAVAO City, aiming to fight the worsening economic crisis head on, urban poor women's groups recently formed a coalition tagged as Kababayen-ang Kabus Nagkahiusa Batok Krisis (KaKaNa), composed of mothers, consumers, OFWs, and vendors. They are taking an activist stance against the rising cost of commodities and other essentials.

Sulu Set to Have a Fishing Port Complex Operational This Year

ZAMBOANGA CITY –

A NEW fishing port complete with cold storage facilities is expected to be constructed in the coastal town of Maimbung in the island-province of Sulu.

Agriculture Secretary Proceso J. Alcala led the ground-breaking ceremony of the P32-million fishing port complex on February 24, according to Sulu governor Abdusakur M. Tan.

Tan said it will have a cold storage that could accommodate at least 10 tons of marine products, possibly for export.

He said they are banking on the waters off Sulu, which is rich with marine resources, to help small fisherfolks in the province.

“The construction of the complex is expected to be completed in a few months and is expected to be operational before the end of the year,” he said in a statement.

He said the cold storage and fish port will be equipped with a land-based power generator to supply the electrical requirements of the facility.

Business leaders in Sulu have earlier noted there

is a need for the government to invest in building infrastructure to help the fishing industry.

Luis Go, former president of the Sulu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, has said that marine exports will revive with the island province having a new airport that could accommodate cargo aircraft to help local producers of high-value commercial fishes to transport their products.

Sulu's economy is highly anchored in agri-based products such as coconut, abaca, seaweed, and other marine based products. (*Darwin Wally T. Wee*)

Symposia...

were furthermore held in Labuan barangay, this city, and in Tuburan, Basilan. He gave the main lecture in all of the assemblies.

Several barangays in Zamboanga City were represented in the assembly held in Amil Tower.

The ceremony was preceded by the old, traditional ritual called “asarakal”, where a group of imams pray together in a chanting fashion. Anawari said the ritual is laudatory, paying tribute to Prophet Mohammad after his death. It is done only during Mawlutun Nabi and has been revived in Zamboanga by his organization.

The other resource persons and speakers in the Amil Tower assembly were Ustadz Abdushahed Tampakan, Sheikh Melgani Sali, Ustadz Jamal Mohammad, police officer Hadji Abdulmar

Lakibul, Abudhar Sagaral, and Bro. Nurhassan Bahjin. The masters of ceremony were Ust. Abdurasil Anawari and Muhammad Hadjimuddin.

The Ahlul-Bayt foundation started operating last 2009 and now runs a school attended by over 50 male and female scholars. It is involved in the propagation of Islam, education, building of mosques, and humanitarian and relief service. It supports orphanages located in the Zamboanga peninsula and provides college scholarships to a number of students in Cotabato and Zamboanga.

Its Islamic school graduates who are eligible for further higher studies are sent to the Al-Mustapha Islamic College in Makati City or abroad, Anawari said)

*Imagine all the people
living life in peace. You
may say I'm a dreamer,
but I'm not the only one.
I hope someday you'll
join us, and the world
will be as one.*

-John Lennon

Archbishop Valles: Pioneer Zamboangueños Launched Catholicism in Mindanao

MORE than 500 secular priests and 11 of their bishops in southern Philippines attended the three-day Diocesan Clergy of Mindanao convention held on February 14-16 here in Zamboanga City.

During the welcome Eucharistic celebration at the shrine of the Nuestra Señora del Pilar, host Archbishop Romulo Valles told the priests that they stand on “sacred ground” where the Roman Catholic faith first took root and from there spread throughout Mindanao. Fort Pilar was the home base of the first Spanish Jesuit missionaries who came to evangelize starting in the 1600s.

Valles said during the mass that the first Zamboanguenos who lived in and around the fort overcame hardships and dangers because they “placed all their trust in Our Mother” and through her on “our Savior”. “They prayed together, and that is how they became church,” he said.

They taught by example, by the way they lived their faith and this is how each generation inspired the next, Archbishop Valles said. Even we priests in Zamboanga come to pray and light candles here, and we are inspired by the strong devotion of the people in Our Mother, he told the visitors.

The convention brought together the diocesan priests, who total to over 700 in Mindanao, for pastoral sharings and to strengthen their bond towards one another, archdiocese’s publicity committee chairman Msgr. David Alonzo said. They also engaged in sports activities in the afternoon of the second day; the third and last day was capped by a closing morning eucharistic mass in the Immaculate Conception Metropolitan Cathedral. Ateneo de Zamboanga University president Fr. Antonio Moreno gave the main talk on the second day on the subject of the convention



Top, Zamboanga Archbishop Romulo Valles talks to Zamboanga City’s media during a press conference held at the convent of St. Ignatius Church (left), site of the DCM convocation. Below, a priest’s t-shirt sharply states the Catholic church’s opposition to the proposed reproductive health bill pending in Congress.



theme of “The Word of God, Our Response to Good Governance and Peace”.

Fr. Moreno told the participants that “peace and good governance will make or break the development of Mindanao” and urged them to seize the new “climate of peace”.

He said local Catholic pastors must claim ownership of the exhortations made by bishops of the Philippines regarding peace and governance through their 26 pastoral letters and statements on the two subjects from 1986 to the present.

Our bishops “are not wanting in their statements” on these concerns, he told his fellow priests, and our challenge is to promote and implement their exhortations – from inter-faith solidarity to fight against corruption to total human development, among others.

The lessons in these pastoral letters and statements are that peace is founded on development and social justice and on a need to work with peoples belonging to all faith traditions as well as to foster peace education in schools, he said. The overarching themes to build

peace and promote good governance, he emphasized, are discipleship such as learning from the poor, participation through inclusion of all stakeholders, communion that binds all together in common quests, and servant-leadership wherein the priests put themselves in the service of people.

The archbishops and bishops also gave short talks to the general assembly on topics ranging from environment to liturgy to upcoming regional ecclesiastical events.

Zamboanga archdiocesan vicar-general Msgr. Crisologo Manungas said the convention is part of the two-year long centenary jubilee of the archdiocese as the first diocese in Mindanao. The main venue of the DCM convention was the Tetuan parish’s St. Ignatius of Loyola church, which is also marking its 150th anniversary this year as the first parish established in Mindanao.

Msgr. Manungas as local DCM coordinator closely assisted DCM president Fr. Danny Fuentes of Davao Oriental in managing the convention activities and requirements.

To the IRSMP: Zamcelco as Governance Riddle

IN its monthly meeting last February 19, the principal topic of the Inter-Religious Solidarity Movement for Peace (IRSMP) was “peace and governance”. The resource person was Department of Interior and Local Government city office acting head Mohammad Taha Arakama, who gave an overview of the various aspects of governance.

The priority thrust of IRSMP this year is “peace and governance”, in tune with society’s and government’s overriding effort to fight and curb corruption as key means to socio-economic progress and consequently the triumph of communal peace.

In the ensuing open forum, one member representing the Commission on Human Rights reminded the gathering about the United Nations’ prescription towards the realization of good governance. These are 1) transparency; 2) accountability; 3) participation (of all stakeholders or concerned sectors; and, 4) rule of law.

The city’s burning issue and problem regarding alleged massive corruption in and mismanagement of the Zamboanga City Electric Cooperative (Zamcelco) was brought out in the forum as a “peace and governance” challenge confronting local electric consumers and citizens. One allegation is that consumers have to pay more for Zamcelco’s electricity than they should if there is but none of the alleged corruption and mismanagement.

Going by the major topic of the meeting, which is “peace and good governance”, the Zamcelco controversy was treated to a quick analysis according to the UN formula.

As to transparency, one question raised is how transparent are the procurement and financial transactions of Zamcelco, such as those involving its allegedly overpriced purchases of motor vehicles and so forth.

As to accountability, one question raised is who really regulates or when it is amiss who in the government bureaucracy is mandated to impose sanctions against Zamcelco when and if it commits any irregularities. Although it calls itself a cooperative, Zamcelco is not under the regulatory supervision of the Cooperative Development Authority, but instead under the National Electrification Administration, which it seems has no power to sanction or punish erring electric coops.

As to participation, the demand by civil society groups led by the Movement for Better Zamboanga for a thorough investigation of and prosecution for the corruption and mismanagement was cited as an example on how this element of good governance is being put into action. It was noted that the

initiative is beginning to show results, albeit slow in coming.

As to rule of law, a lawyer in the forum said that in the Zamcelco instance there would have been no need for the Movement for Better Zamboanga to go to the City Council, as the group did last week, to ask for a resolution to support its demand for the preventive suspension of the Zamcelco general manager during the ongoing investigation of the corruption charges. According to the law, he said, such a preventive suspension of a government of-



IRSMP evangelicals convenor Rev. Paul Ersando presents a token to DILG city officer in charge Mohammad Taha Arakama during the group’s monthly meeting after the latter gave a talk on good governance.

ficial can be automatically enforced once an administrative charge is lodged against him/her, as in the case of NEA doing so against the Zamcelco management. Unfortunately, even the councilors appear to have failed to realize that point of law, but voted against the petition of the Movement. Apparently, the Zamcelco issue requires more light before the sought-after justice to the electric consumers shall be served.

Our Gun Culture

THE present nationwide upsurge in crimes has prompted a small clamor for a total gun ban. Indeed, holduppers armed with pistols nowadays strike even in broad daylight in public places. Here in Mindanao private armies with meaner firearms massacre people with impunity while kidnappers armed to the teeth roam the countryside to pick up victims.

According to official data revealed in a recent news report, there are over a million registered firearms, two-thirds of which are in the hands of civilians. Loose, unregistered weapons probably number in a few hundreds of thousands more, which are used by bandits, terrorists, and criminals or kept by ordinary civilians.

“The easy availability of guns, according to Ateneo de Manila University professor Jennifer Santiago Oreta, tends to increase the in-

cidence of violence against the civilian population”, the report said. It further quoted the professor as saying that “Mere possession of a gun emboldens one to take drastic action”. The Ampatuan massacre is one, though extreme, demonstration of that truth.

In 2002, the report noted, the Philippines ranked fifth globally in terms of murder committed with the use of firearms – and that wasn’t even an election year and years before the Maguindanao atrocities.

There is no question that the move to ban totally the possession or carrying of firearms by civilians, and that is, other than military men and law enforcers, is full of merit and logic as a means to curb our high level of criminality. It can also lead to the reduction of corruption in government or conserve the environment because a gun ban will deprive high government officials of the means to coerce other

people who will otherwise blow the whistle or refuse to accede to their crime.

Many of the more peaceful nations around the world strictly restrict the ownership or use of firearms. In contrast, in our country and others like the United States, which is also among the top five in the number of murders committed with the use of firearms, ownership is considered a Constitutional right.

Centuries of rebellion, feudalism and political patronage backed by violence has also made gunslinging an ingrained feature of Filipino culture. Nonetheless, a sudden, radical or paradigm shift of the national perspective in regard to this overwhelming problem is possible and would be the only way for people to become promptly more trusting and peaceful towards one another. (*Our Peace/Peace Advocates Zamboanga*)

MNLF Commanders Call Anew for Unity, Full Implementation of Peace Accord

By Faber Concepcion

SENIOR leaders, commanders, integrees, professionals, and other supporters of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) have passed a manifesto calling for a united front and at the same time appealed for unity and reconciliation among its leaders.

During a consultation held at the Garden orchids Hotel in Zamboanga City on February 24, some 200 participants discussed and agreed upon recommendations and suggestions on the implementation of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement and their stand on the proposal to postpone Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) scheduled for this year.

A manifesto signed by the participants was addressed to the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Member States, Islamic Non Government Organization (NGO), Government Republic of the Philippines (GRP), Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

The group also lauded Philippine President Benigno Simeon Aquino III for endorsing the postponement of the ARMM elections even as it called for the full implementation of the peace accord.

Prof. Julkipli Wadi, Dean of the Institute of Islamic Studies of University of the Philippines, was the keynote speaker during the consultation, which was followed by an open forum.

"After the deliberation of the Consultative Meeting on February 24, 2011, 9 am - 5 pm at Garden Orchid Hotel, Zamboanga City, we, the participants composed of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Senior Leaders, Commanders, MNLF Integrees, Professionals, Mass Leaders, Supporters of the Moro National

Zamboanga Assistant Grand Mufti Ustadz Abdulwakil Tanjilil addresses the MNLF conference.



Liberation Front and Junior Cadres Officers composed of Syrian, Pakistan and Libyan Commandoes (all foreign trained) who spearheaded the activities came out with the following constructive recommendations and suggestions:

1. All believers are but brethren. Hence, (when-ever they are at odds,) make peace between two brethren, and remain conscious of GOD, so that you might be graced with his mercy. (Qur'an 49:10).

a. As a Muslim, the verse mentioned above shall be serving as Guiding Principles in performing the task to Call for Unity and Reconciliation of the MNLF Leaders.

b. Calling and appealing to the two brothers MNLF and MILF leadership to comply, respect, and honor the Dushanbe Resolution No. 2/37 of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)-Council of Foreign Ministers Meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan from 4 to 6 Jumadal Thani 1431H, (18-20 May, 2010), mandating the OIC Secretary General His Excellency Prof. EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU, "urges the MNLF and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front(MILF) to unite their efforts for the peace and development of the Bangsamoro people" in order to achieve total unity among our peoples for Peace and Development of Mindanao and its island.

2. Requesting and appealing to the OIC Mem-

ber States, IDB and other Islamic NGOs to accelerate their medical, humanitarian, economic, financial, and technical assistance for the development of the Bangsamoro homeland, particularly in the areas ravaged and devastated by the decades of conflict. Like recently, Jolo, Sulu was destroyed by the natural calamities.

3. Calling the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) for the meaningful implementation of the September 2, 1996 Final Peace Agreement in accordance with the letter and spirit of the December 1976 Tripoli Agreement.

4. Salute and appreciation to the Aquino Administration in postponing the ARMM election.

Principal Convenors led by junior officers of the MNLF to include Alimatar Alfad, Jadjurie Arasa and Ustadah Abdulkhabir "tuan Val" Musa said among those present were Ustadz Muslimin Asirin, MNLF Representative to Libya, Ustadz Abdulwakil Tanjilil, Asst. Mufti, Darul IFTA, and Director General of Salam Islamic Institute: Prof. Abubakar Mohammad: Dr. Tambayaa Manjooras, member of the Central Committee and Chief of Intelligence; Dr. Abdurahman Amin, who used to be the Liason officer to the OIC and the whole of Islamic world league and a member of the Central Committee.

Jennifer...

thank God, I did not fail them," she said.

Jennifer, as a peace enthusiast who dreams that one day peace and harmony will completely reign in her dear Zamboanga, said her win is already an achievement for her.

Active officer of various school organizations in her school, she is the president of Zion Youth Peace Corps. The organization aims to promote world peace and friendship among fellowmen and to help and encourage common people in their social and economic de-

velopment.

"Recently, we conducted an outreach program, by bringing relief goods to the less fortunate in Barangay San Roque (a suburban village in Zamboanga). It has been an overwhelming experience, when you know that you are helping your kind," she said with a smile.

She revealed that she was brought up in a closely bonded family, where God is the center of their family relationship. Theirs is a born-again Christian family, she said.

Her simplicity is also reflected when, as a graduating student, she was asked what course she wants to take up, and she instantly replied, "I simply want to take up education, and be a teacher."

"I believe teaching is a noble profession. This is what I want, and this I know will make me happy. If you are happy with what you do, you can achieve the highest peak of your ambition." She added.

With this kind of attitude, Jennifer has a long way to go, and a champion all the way, too.

[AROUND MINDANAO]



Residents paddle across a flooded portion of the national highway in Santiago, Agusan del Norte after days of downpour in the area earlier this February. Hundreds of commuters were stranded when the national highway was closed due to the flood. Mindanews Photo by Ruby Thursday More

'Respect Our Traditions,' Lumads Elders Tell Pulangi Hydro Plant Opposition

MALAYBALAY, Bukidnon (MindaNews/8 Feb) – A stakeholders' forum on the proposed Pulangi 5 hydro electric power project in Kibawe town with about a thousand participants turned into a stage for Manobo Lumad elders to call on those opposed to the project to respect their traditions and processes.

Pulangi 5 is a 300-megawatt hydropower project undergoing pre-development stage.

Apo Caid Lansawan, 95, revered as the "Father of Arakan Valley," said during the gathering that they are pained by the fact that younger Manobos have been misrepresenting the development aspirations of the tribe and are allowing themselves to be used by outsiders who allegedly rely on foreign funding for their projects.

"If, indeed, they care for the Lumads, they should respect our traditional processes in settling tribal differences," said Apo Lansawan, said to be the most senior Manobo elder in Bukidnon and North Cotabato areas.

Feliciano "Datu Mansalida" Anggaan, tribal chieftain of Damulog town and barangay captain of Anggaan, said non-governmental organizations are "misrepresenting them and causing division among the Manobos."

He said the Legal Resources and Natural Resources Center (LRC) and other groups organizing to oppose the Pulangi 5 project should have followed the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) principle before entering their communities as their presence has affected cultural harmony.

He also lamented the moves of LRC and the indigenous people's federation, Natabuk, on what he said was a "serious revision of Manobo culture and history" by allegedly insisting that one of their ancestors, Apo Mamalu, was buried in Mikasili in Damulog town.

Rights Advocates Stage Protest a Year after US Forces' Interpreter's Death

ILIGAN CITY (MindaNews/2 Feb) – Human rights activists commemorated the death of an interpreter for United States soldiers by staging a rally in front of the Army's 103rd

Infantry Battalion headquarters in Campo Ranao in neighboring Marawi City Feb. 2.

They also held an interfaith prayer at the gymnasium of the main campus of the Mindanao State University.

Gregan Cardeno, from Ipil in Zamboanga Sibugay, was hired by the Skylink Security Agency in 2010 to serve as interpreter for US soldiers based at the 103IB headquarters. He died inside one of the rooms assigned to American troops, the latter claiming he died of suicide.

Relatives were not convinced, according to Clarivel C. Santos, Cardeno's sister.

In a mobile phone interview, Santos said they are reminding the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to hasten the investigation of Gregan's case because until now the petition for writ of amparo and habeas corpus, pending at the Court of Appeals, remained undecided.

"The family expressed frustration to the CHR and DOJ because of the turtle-paced process in bringing justice to Gregan and his family," said Faye Reyes, of the Justice for Gregan Cardeno Movement.

She said 200 persons from Kawagid, InPeace Mindanao of Davao and Zamboanga, Patriotiko Mindanao, religious groups, including members of the Catholic Sisters Association, joined in the commemoration.

Cardeno, then 33 years old, died within the premises of the 103IB when it was headed by Brigadier Gen. Rey Ardo. His Lanao tour of duty ended recently when he was appointed by President Aquino to head the government's Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCCH), otherwise known as the cease-fire committee.

The American soldiers were embedded in Philippine Army brigades under the US-RP Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA).

At Least 259 Mindanao Books since 2000
Two hundred fifty nine? Yes, at least 259 books on Mindanao or written by Mindanawons have been published since 2000, most of them on history and peace-building.

REBECCA...

And strengthen love, wherever it grows

–
And love is as perennial as grass, as the "Desiderata" proclaims.
Love, my good pastor says, is only as good and strong as one's forgiveness. Hmmm, perhaps something like to err his human,
To forgive is divine – seven times seventy-seven?

My father later told us he was treated like a king
By the relatives of Hamza's father
During his stay in the family's ancestral home
In Basilan, during the negotiation for our uncle's freedom.
That just blew his mind – and all his cultural biases away.

Thanks to Hamza's father, our uncle was released
In one wiser, stronger piece: Uncle, too, forgave his kidnappers.

After this incident, I began to see that here in Zamboanga
Despite the onrushing complexity of our society,
A truism about ourselves will continue to keep us –
Muslims and Christians – closely, brotherly together.
As Saul Below said: "The forgiveness of sin is perpetual,
And righteousness first is not required."
The more we forgive and love on, the more we remain the same,
That is, the more we become truly human and humane.
This is how we, the people of this city, Muslims and Christians all together
Make Zamboanga Hermosa a real and everlasting experience.

My sister and Hamza got married last summer, after she graduated.
Rebecca is now with child.
Hamza and she say that if it will be a boy, his name will be Abraham.
And this is how we in Zamboanga
Just like my sister Rebecca and brother Hamza
Live happily ever and ever and ever after!
(end)

Cont. on Page 4/At Least...